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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the nature of second language immersion learning and instruction through the lens of situated learning theory. This theory has strong relevance for language immersion practice and research. An emerging research program is introduced that is focused on the overlap of immersion learning and situated learning theory, and an initial study is discussed that explored how learners think, feel, and act during initial meetings with immersion environments. (Author/JL)

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Situated Learning in Immersion Environments

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The nature of immersion learning and instruction will be considered through the lens of situated learning theory. This theory has strong relevance for language immersion practice and research. This session will introduce an emerging research program focused on the overlap of immersion learning and situated learning theory, briefly looking at an initial study that explored how learners think, feel, and act during initial meetings with immersion environments.

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There is no doubt that wonderful learning happens daily in content-based immersion classrooms. In these dynamic settings, we consistently see two types of learning that students can be proud of: mastery of content-relevant knowledge and skills, and increasing linguistic proficiency.

The picture is not a consistent one, however. The mastery of content seems to be the most consistent finding in research. The development of linguistic proficiency seems to be the spottier of the two. As rich as immersion classrooms are both academically and linguistically, students are better at matching their target language peers in the academic forum than in the linguistic forum.

The manner in which content and language are taught and mastered deserve special attention in order to understand why this happens. Indeed, the content and language aspect of immersion classrooms already do receive a deal of attention in the foreign language literature, albeit in a somewhat piecemeal manner. Raising our gaze to the process of learning *in general* can put the *particular* aspects of learning in the immersion classroom into a more holistic and coherent framework. The better the general model of learning that we work from to guide us in addressing the myriad of issues inherent to immersion settings in particular, the better we may redress the linguistic gap in a holistic rather than patchwork manner.

The nature of immersion language learning

In a review of the kind of learning that goes on in elementary immersion classrooms, Swain (1996) reported that immersion students enrolled in both early full and mid full immersion programs performed equally well in subjects taught in the target language as their peers who studied the same subjects in their native language. Swain also found that the early and mid full immersion students achieved comparable target language competence. Swain's findings show that as long as the learning occurs in a full immersion program, whenever it may commence for the learner, there is no achievement deficit involved in learning content in a target language.

On the other hand, it is repeatedly found that the language learned and used in immersion learning environments is not complete in its mimicry of the language used by native target language speakers (Parker, Heitzman, Fjerstad, Babbs & Cohen, 1995). Students show a high level of receptive skills, but delayed age-appropriate productive skills, and their language tends to be less complex and idiomatic than that of native speakers. Based on anecdotal evidence that students tend to speak more L2 with the teacher than with each other, Parker et al. tested this hypothesis in a Spanish elementary immersion classroom. They found that «foreign language plays a more limited role in the immersion classroom than current popular notions about immersion education would indicate» (p. 250). Indeed, the students in their study were most consistent in speaking Spanish with their teacher than anyone else in the classroom. Furthermore, their speaking tended to be rather limited in focus, being primarily content-based.

Content-based discourse is by no means the only type of discourse that native speakers tend to speak. A style of discourse that natives use quite considerably is social in nature. Parker et al. postulate that the reason for the dearth of socially-based student discourse in this otherwise content-rich environment lies in how students hear very little social language spoken by the teacher and lack any other target language speaker modeling social discourse. As a result, they

have little opportunity to practice social language in the classroom. As students attend to social needs among peers, then, L1 becomes the default language of discourse.

In a careful study of classroom discourse patterns, Swain (1996) found teacher vocabulary to be limited to curricular themes, most of which are very heavily text-based in origin. Patterns of speech that are unique to spoken language are not nearly as prevalent in the classroom discourse as text-based discourse patterns. Furthermore, Swain has observed that teacher language is also often quite functionally restricted, limiting the range of functional patterns that students hear modeled. As for student discourse, there is considerably less in the L2 classroom than in the L1 classroom (Swain,1996). The L2 utterances also tend to be substantially shorter than they tend to be in comparable L1 situations.

This pattern of language use changes over time as well. Students tend to speak the most target language in immersion classrooms in the lower grades (Tarone and Swain,1995). As they get older, there is progressively more L1 interference, particularly in social contexts and especially among peers. The student L2 discourse becomes increasingly more task-oriented in higher grade immersion classrooms, becoming increasingly *diglossic*, with the target language being the language spoken primarily with the teacher and during task-oriented discourse, and the native language spoken primarily with peers during socially-oriented discourse.

Tarone and Swain (1995) attribute this progression to the presence of two styles of speech at play in the classroom community: the academic and the vernacular. The vernacular style is used when students play, compete, assert their identity, tease, and so on. Because identity becomes increasingly important for kids as they grow older, this pattern of resorting more and more to L1 vernacular in the classroom is probably a sign that students feel a stronger need to assert their identity in the language they can assert it in best. Students in immersion classrooms clearly lack exposure to and scaffolding with sufficient L2 vernacular to meet their social needs. In order to develop L2 vernacular, students need exposure to both the vernacular style of language and the non-academic contexts in which the vernacular is used. As anything they learn, students also need opportunities to practice the vernacular in order to fully master it.

Tarone (1995) has found concrete examples of students who display different degrees of functional competence in different situations (see, for example, Liu, 1991, 1994). Students who may perform at one level of functional competence in content-related discourse may perform at a higher level of functional competence in social discourse with peers. As interactional demands of situations may vary, so may student performance – especially given variance in the degree of scaffolding the different situations may provide the student in terms of encouragement, opportunity and level-appropriateness. Tarone summarizes that «it seems obvious that L2 teachers need to provide learners with exposure to as wide a range of interactional contexts as possible. Certainly, the student needs L2 input in more than just teacher-student interactional contexts. Good models of student-student interactions are needed» (p. 268)

Finally, functional competence aside, even accent may be related to the breadth of exposure individuals have to target culture situations and speakers. In a recent study of native German speakers who moved to the U.S. at different ages, it was found that the less accented their English

was, the more acculturated they tended to be into the host culture (Hansen, 1995). In Hansen's limited sample, the finding seemed to hold regardless of the age at which the individuals began learning English.

In light of the research above, evidence indicates that immersion classrooms are effective places to master curricular content and content-appropriate language. Conversely, the evidence indicates that the scope of language learning that occurs in immersion environments is quite limited and could be better. To address this, immersion classroom curricula have room to grow in terms of how effective they are at:

1. Helping students approximate functional competence in a wider range of settings (social as well as academic), and
2. Increasing peer-peer interactions in the target language.

How well our students are received in target language settings once they leave our immersion classrooms may be enhanced by addressing these two points with the added benefit of moving students closer to native pronunciation. If Hansen's findings can be generalized to the immersion classroom, we may find that greater acculturation into the target culture and language helps to improve student approximations of native pronunciation.

Clearly, our more traditional approaches to learning and instruction are constraining our ability to improve our students' functional competence, peer interactions in the target language and their approximation of native pronunciation. In remainder of this paper, a relatively new model for learning called «situated learning» (Lave & Wenger, 1991) will be proposed as a viable substitute for the conventional model widely used in classrooms today. By contrasting it with the conventional model, the new model will first be used to pinpoint how we may address our current areas of weakness more effectively. The new model will then be considered from a research perspective in order to flesh out what we need to do to test its validity in our immersion classrooms. Finally, we will briefly look at nascent research that has already been started that tests relevance of this model for our understanding of immersion situations.

Two competing views of learning and instruction

Situated learning

In the 80's, research started really looking closer at learning *in situ*. From that angle, we began to regard learning as an enculturation process that necessarily involves activity, concept and culture in full interdependence with each other (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989). In this tradition, «newcomer» learning is most effective when the new learners find themselves in direct (rather than abstract) contact with a community of practice. In order for the newcomers to master a discipline or task like the «oldtimers», or experts in that community, they must acquire the requisite knowledge and skills *and* learn how to use them in culturally appropriate manners in order to be recognized or accepted as *bona fide* practitioners in that culture.

Out of this type of inquiry sprang a model of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). They maintain that each community of practice has a heritage. When newcomers meet practitioners of a particular «heritage» and wish to associate with it, a process of negotiation among them begins. The process revolves around gaining control of the resources that belong to

that community of practice, i.e., the language used by the community's members (e.g., in order to be a doctor, you have to talk like one), the physical tools of the community (e.g., hospitals, surgical instruments) the symbolic tools of the community (e.g., ways of thinking and problem-solving in relation to illness) and the interpersonal relations among the members of the community.

The oldtimers, or those who Lave and Wenger refer to as *full participants*, are people who have successfully gained access to and control of the community's resources. The newcomers, or those who Lave and Wenger refer to as *legitimate peripheral participants*, are novices to the community who have been accorded access to the community's resources. Among these kinds of community members, the community also consists of people with varying degrees of resource control that lie between that of the newcomer and the oldtimer.

The process of gaining control of community resources happens gradually and incrementally, yet in quite a variety of ways and not necessarily with direct, extended contact with oldtimers. As a matter of fact, in this model, a lot of the learning occurs through the observation of people at *different* levels of skill within the community. It also occurs through active contact with other *newcomers* more so than with oldtimers.

In a target culture, you might consider the natives of that culture, regardless of their age, the oldtimers. They speak the language fluently, they understand how to use the physical tools that exist and are valued in their culture, they understand and know how to negotiate the inherently key symbols in their culture, they understand how relationships among the members of the culture function and know ways to effectively negotiate them. A newcomer, on the other hand, may be an exchange student moving into that culture from abroad. As anybody who has spent a year with an exchange student knows, the first while during the year is often spent watching a lot and saying relatively little. As the student's understanding of what is acceptable practice within a host family increases, for example, the student loosens up and becomes a more active participant, steadily growing in her ability to «fit in» behaviorally, linguistically and mentally like a native.

Key to how the exchange student's year transpires is how the student is met by the community (the community «stance») and how the student in turn meets the community (the newcomer «trajectories») (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Each stance and each trajectory pose different conditions for the learning process.

As Lave and Wenger summarize, at any given time a community may try to sequester a newcomer, thereby providing access to the community resources and thereby «legitimizing» that person in the community's eyes. On the other hand, a community may meet a newcomer with benign neglect, showing an impartiality towards that person's access to the community resources. This is probably the most common stance exchange students deal with on a daily basis. Finally, the community may try to avoid or obstruct that person's access to the community's resources, effectively freezing them out.

As influential as a community stance may be to the ease in which a newcomer may gain access to the community, the community stance is by no means the be all, end all for community membership. Coexistent with the community stance is the newcomer «trajectory». Lave and

Wenger postulate that at any given time a newcomer may (1) seek to join a community, (2) meet the community with impartiality, or (3) avoid or withdraw from it.

For the student who wishes to join a community that in turn seeks to sequester him, access to the community's resources is made relatively easy. On the other hand, the student who wishes to join a community, that in turn meets him with benign neglect or avoidance/obstruction faces a tougher task. That student must engage in «improvised practice» without substantial assistance in order to initially open the door and subsequently begin securing access to the community's resources.

In Figure 1, the primary interactional dynamics that can occur within this model are summarized. When you consider the perspective of the most commonly practiced approach to learning in schools today, you see that education is primarily focused on the first column of dynamics. It virtually ignores the other two columns of interactions. Although we are not trained as teachers to ignore or obstruct our students' learning, the top row in this figure alerts us to other dynamics that we may to do well to prepare ours students to manage on their own when they meet communities that seem to meet them with a non-sequestering stance. After all, the skills necessary for a student to successfully gain membership into a community of practice are clearly different when they are met by impartiality or obstruction than when they are sequestered.

Figure 1. The interactional dynamics of the situated learning model.

		Community Stance	
Newcomer Trajectory	Sequester	Benign Neglect	Avoid/Obstruct
Join			
Benign Neglect			
Avoid/Withdraw			

Of course, access is even less likely when students themselves meet a community with benign neglect or avoidance/withdrawal, and in these situations, interstitial communities may develop (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Interstitial communities are formed with others of like mind and manner and may develop in situations where (1) newcomers meet a community with a joining trajectory and are unsuccessful in gaining legitimacy in the community, or (2) newcomers meet a community

with a non-joining trajectory. These interstitial communities are typically defined by resources different from those in the initial community of practice. In the case of foreign exchange students, those who do not successfully acculturate to the new culture may establish or retreat into interstitial communities. These communities may be composed of other exchange students with different backgrounds from those in the primary community of practice, yet with similar experiences in dealing with the primary community of practice. At the university level, for example, it is common for international students to have their own social organization and often to live in communities heavily populated with other foreign students as well.

In sum, this model of learning is about newcomers and oldtimers. It involves newcomers noticing opportunities for learning and procuring access to them within a community of practice. It is also about the resources and control thereof that are required in order to become a full member of that community. The manner in which people gain resource control is much less oldtimer-dependent in a controlled, abstract setting than what we are accustomed to in our contemporary classroom. Instead, learning happens more in «real» situations with the help of observation and incremental practice with real tasks together with oldtimers *and/or* peers or near-peers.

Conventional classroom learning

Let's contrast the Lave and Wenger approach to learning with the most commonly practiced approach to learning used in our schools today. In current instructional practice, knowledge and thought are typically thought of as context-independent, consisting of concepts and facts (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989). It is believed that these concepts and facts can be learned in one environment and easily transferred or applied to another as long as the relevance of the knowledge is clear to the learner, and the learner is motivated to make the transfer (Resnick, 1989).

In these kinds of classrooms, learners engage in significant individual and isolated activity, and the bulk of the learning is done by manipulating symbols, typically in contexts separate from the real-world contexts in which the symbolic skills would have direct relevance and often concrete counterparts (Resnick, 1989). For assessment purposes, students are typically asked to demonstrate their learning individually, without the aid of learning tools such as books or computers.

With these kinds of systems underlying today's classroom teaching, schools as we know them provide ideal environments for learning. Were all learners successful in this environment, or were knowledge and thought exclusively concepts and facts, children in today's classrooms would be highly successful. Indeed, many are. However, those who succeed in school are schooled to be successful in a rather limited range of contexts and with a narrowly defined aspect of knowledge. Those who aren't successful walk away with even less.

A study of effective schools in the teaching of learning skills, thinking skills and higher order cognitive abilities, indicated that the most successful schools are quite different from the more traditional schools (Resnick, 1987). The kind of learning that transpires inside the *successful* schools is more like the kind of learning that occurs *outside* of traditional schools. In these successful schools, the intellectual work is often socially shared. There is considerable modeling of how to perform tasks. Students are encouraged to observe and comment on others' work.

They gradually build up their skills, sometimes starting at quite an unskilled level with more skilled people to guide them. They frequently work together on completing joint tasks and tend to do subject-specific work rather than work on general abilities.

Assessing and addressing the weaknesses of traditional learning and instruction with a situated learning lens

Assessing

Resnick's (1987) findings alert us to alternative approaches to learning that may redress some of the gaps inherent in our present classroom traditions. Lave and Wenger's 1991 model provides us with a concrete framework to work with wherein learning is regarded as the mastery of *more* than concepts and facts. From this perspective, learning involves enculturation into a way of thinking, speaking and acting with the help of others who represent all levels of skill within the community of practice. Also, the assessment of skill and knowledge involves monitoring students' functional competence within socially relevant contexts (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989).

Because of the situated nature of learning in this model, both learning and assessment need to occur within authentic situations which prepare students to actively and appropriately integrate and apply their learning after having observed and practiced successive approximations of expert practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Successive approximations are supported by others who model, coach and fade, allowing students to observe, practice with guidance and gradually move to more independent practice (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989).

The observation aspect of this process cannot be under-rated. From a cognitive perspective, observation provides learners with a conceptual model of the knowledge or skill to be learned (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989). Observation aids learners by providing: (1) an advanced organizer for what to expect during their initial attempts to master the desired skill or material, (2) an interpretive structure that makes sense of feedback encountered during the learning process, and (3) an internalized guide to lead the learner through successive approximations of mastery during independent practice.

From a social context perspective, observation provides learners with models of «expertise-in-use» (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989). Multiple masters often display different manners of expertise-in-use, thereby modeling that there can be more than one way to approach a task or materials. Peers in the learning process also provide different levels of expertise-in-use to observe, exemplifying the incremental process of moving towards mastery while establishing recognizable mileposts along the way.

If we think of situated learning as a type of apprenticeship, we see that in order to realize the same successful effects of apprenticeship in trade environments, Collins, Brown and Newman underscore that

> [we] must find a way to create a culture of expert practice for students to participate in and aspire to, as well as devise meaningful benchmarks and incentives for progress... [This kind of apprenticeship] should extend situated learning to diverse settings so that students learn how to apply their skills in varied contexts. Moreover, the abstract principles

underlying the application of knowledge and skills in different settings should be articulated as fully as possible by the teacher, whenever they arise in different contexts (p. 459).

Addressing

By contrasting the most common model in today's classroom with the model of situated learning, we see three weak areas in our present conceptions of learning and instruction: the «teacher», the curriculum, and linguistic modeling. Today, we ascribe the majority of the «teaching» responsibility to one «oldtimer», namely the teacher. The teacher is naturally limited in how much she can «teach» the class and attend to individual students in a 50 minute session. Also, given the prescribed content-base of our immersion curricula, teacher discourse is easily constrained topically. The situated learning model inspires a reconsideration of the parameters that currently govern our immersion teaching.

Parameter one: The teacher. The first parameter that situated learning invites us to reconsider is the grip the teacher has on the classroom, suggesting instead more room for learning from peers and, more importantly, near-peers. This requires two things: (1) preparing students to successfully manage the task in groups or on their own, and (2) providing students meaningful access to others at different levels of linguistic proficiency.

For students to manage their learning, a learning culture has to be established that helps students understand how to actively take a hand in their own learning and enables them to put that understanding into practice (effectively preparing them to successfully deal with impartiality or obstruction when they meet them). This requires the development of good observational and reflective skills as well as models in the environment for students to learn from.

Cooperative learning is one instructional means that can be used to help students share more of the learning load with the teacher and others in the classroom -- especially since poor learners, unlike effective learners, may have the same opportunities to observe expert practice yet still fail to reflect and capitalize on those observations through questioning, clarifying, or summarizing them (Brown and Palincsar, 1989). Cooperative learning groups assist learning by (1) providing social support for learning efforts, (2) providing culturally appropriate participant learning structures both for the people in the group and the environment in which the group is functioning, (3) distributing the thinking load among the members such that evolving understandings can be jointly managed, (4) modeling cognitive processing among the members in the group (such as instructing, raising questions, making plans for how to proceed, reconciling differences and working through conflicts), (5) facilitating the sharing of expertise among group members, (6) inviting elaboration as members seek deeper understandings, (7) inviting argumentation such as justification, warrants and backings as members demand evidence of views presented by others, and (8) raising alternative and perhaps conflicting viewpoints. Best of all, once exposed to multiple ways of thinking through a task, members increase their chances of internalizing the skills represented in the group. In essence, cooperative learning groups effectively model a scaffolding process and guide peer-peer learning in a manner similar to the way peers or near-peers scaffold learning in Lave and Wenger's model.

For students to garner access others at different levels of language proficiency, the learning environment must provide students with opportunities to work together with same- and different-level peers. Whereas homogeneous environments may be effective for certain kinds of instruction and practice, heterogeneous environments provide a broader base for growth than homogenous environments do as well as more mileposts by which students may monitor their own growth. With school parameters such as they are, this second point requires more creativity to realize than the first, yet it *is* possible (think language clubs, computer activities and correspondence, collaboration with other classes on children's book-writing or video productions, film and TV interest groups, target language outdoor adventure groups or service groups, and so forth).

Parameter two: The curriculum. A second parameter that situated learning invites us to reconsider is the teacher's control over the curriculum. Learning with peers and near-peers may be more effective when the students themselves have a greater hand in guiding the content to be learned. Teachers may cover the requisite content by determining the overarching themes to be covered but give students the freedom to choose projects within those themes that have personal meaning or relevance for them. Since social discourse currently occurs primarily in L1, essentially defining an interstitial group within the immersion classroom, it is clear that there currently are insufficient opportunities for students to acquire and practice the L2 vernacular. Teachers can facilitate increased language breadth by arranging opportunities for students to explore both topics and language in sub-areas that interest them. Combining this with student opportunities to work together with others at different degrees of academic and vernacular L2 proficiency may ensure greater transmission of the linguistic curricular which we are striving to expand.

Parameter three: The experience. A third parameter that situated learning invites us to reconsider is how much time we spend *learning about* rather than *experiencing* a domain. When we abstract concepts and facts from the contexts in which they are directly relevant, we remove considerable richness from the learning experience. When we remove richness, we limit the connections that students may make with the material (academically, linguistically and personally), thereby reducing our ability to positively influence student trajectories, learning, and enculturation into the community. With all the inherent checks and balances that naturally exist in «real settings», learning *in situ* also reduces the need for the construction of contrived assessments. As already mentioned, by opening the door for our students to engage in «real» situations or events, we also open the door for both ourselves and our students to monitor their linguistic proficiency and growth authentically.

Testing the viability of new parameters in our immersion environments

The invitations to reconsider current practice provided by the model of situated learning are speculative. The logic of the model leads us to draw the above conclusions, yet the actual practice of them has yet to be systematically practiced and tested. In light of the gaps registered in the immersion classroom literature and the red flags raised by the situated learning model, the two main aspects of immersion learning that ultimately warrant closer scrutiny are the nature of the situations and the opportunities students for peer-peer interactions as they relate to language development.

Situations

In order to validate the viability of situational effects on language development, we need to compare how functional language proficiency develops among students in exposed to the typical range of situations in conventional immersion classrooms and students exposed to a wider range of situations in broader-based immersion programs. Tarone and Swain (1995) highlighted the different styles of discourse learned by students on a field trip to Quebec, Canada as evidence that students can acquire the vernacular in «vernacular-rich» environments. As complementary as trips to the target culture are to classroom teaching, we should by no means look to them as the only source of situational variety.

Looking to domestic examples of more diverse immersion settings, one broader-based program wherein this kind of research could begin is the Concordia Language Villages of Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. The Language Villages have long worked to teach language experientially in immersion settings. Because the students who attend the language villages typically attend for two weeks at a time in the summer and the programming goes on all the waking hours students are in attendance, the range of activities that students participate in span a much broader range than what is typical for classroom settings. Additionally, the activities offered are highly representative of activities students would naturally participate in with peers in the target culture (playing soccer, going out to eat, listening to the radio, hiking, participating in musical ensembles, and so on). A comparison between the types of discourse styles that students use in this environment and the types of discourse styles students use in an immersion classroom would provide a sound base for an investigation of the role situations may play on discourse practice – especially in terms of L2 vernacular.

Understanding that it takes some cognitive and affective effort to successfully negotiate an immersion experience, Dahl (1997) has looked at how people who are exposed to a setting in which they feel foreign tend to think, feel and act in light of the stance of the community they meet. Recent analyses comparing people who described experiences from immersion settings with people who described experiences from in non-immersion settings did reveal some group differences that warrant closer attention. The findings from this work may provide some cognitive and affective leads for how to better prepare students to effectively join communities who meet them with each of the three types of stances, and how to prepare teachers to better sequester students who meet them with each of the three types of trajectories.

Peer-peer interactions in the target language

In order to validate the viability of peer-peer interactions on language development, student-student interactions need to be compared with teacher-student interactions for the types of language used in each. Heidi Hamilton (personal communication, November 18, 1997) is currently comparing the discourse of beginning and advanced students of German, Japanese and French at the Concordia Language Villages. She is comparing the discourse among students and between students and teachers in more formal, ritualized classroom settings and in activities such as cooking and arts and crafts. By analyzing both teacher and student discourse in terms of situation, amount, speech acts, interactional patterns, error correction, and repair, she is exploring the effects of language thresholds on the manner in which students manage each type of activity linguistically.

Another angle for study is what students learn and use from each other when peers from two language communities interact. The author of this paper is currently exploring the type of language used among teenagers of two cultures in a two-way immersion program (Norwegian and English). The discourse under scrutiny is Norwegian spoken by native English speakers with their Norwegian-speaking peers, and English spoken by native Norwegian speakers with their English-speaking peers. A pilot was run in the summer of 1997 to test the observational tools, and data collection is anticipated in 1998.

Finally, work is needed in comparing the discourse used by (1) peers with peers who are at the *same* level of language proficiency, and (2) peers with peers at *different* levels of language proficiency. To date, I know of no research studying these interactions, yet in order to truly test the viability of peer-peer learning as a tool in immersion classrooms, such research is sorely needed.

Enculturation and pronunciation

To date, we do not yet know the viability of the situated learning model for immersion classrooms. Nevertheless, the logical conclusions that we draw from it lead us to ponder whether teaching and learning within this framework may lead our students toward a greater degree of academic and linguistic enculturation into the culture we seek to represent in our immersion classrooms. If we find evidence in our research that students who are exposed to a broader range of situations and who engage in more peer- and near-peer interactions do, indeed, approximate functional competence in more styles of discourse, then we may test whether improved academic and linguistic enculturation yields even greater approximations of native pronunciation.

The next step

We need to constantly assess current views of learning and instruction. We need to weigh our satisfaction with what we've got against what we ultimately wish for. If we want fill the gaps that we know exist in order in order to expand on our success, there are good indications that revitalized practice will bring us there more effectively than our current practice will. Rather than throw out the baby with the bath water, we need to find approaches that preserve the effects that we value while paving the way for the effects that we desire. The better we do that, the easier it will be for us to secure our course and set our sites on long-term rather than short-term instructional goals. Only when we have a clear sense of what we are aiming for in the long haul will our sense of the immediate needs naturally follow in a coherent and cohesive manner.

In light of what we know to be our most pressing gaps in immersion education, I propose that we consider situated learning as a new framework to guide our next steps in the classroom and in the lab. Using a sound framework for both instruction and research, we can intelligently scout out a new direction together. The proof will be in the pudding, and the ingredients look good. I anticipate that if we roll up our sleeves and jump right in, hearty results will emerge.

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